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With great fanfare and ceremony, Great Lakes leaders promised Friday to spend no longer than a year figuring out how to clean up and protect the world's largest source of fresh water.

Led by Mike Leavitt, administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the group of politicians called their effort an unprecedented attempt to coordinate federal and state programs dealing with the lakes.

Environmental groups welcomed attention from Cabinet officials, who flew in from Washington to talk about the lakes' importance to the nation. But the lakes need financial help, they said, not more study.

"I'm not interested in another gabfest," said Cameron Davis, executive director of the Lake Michigan Federation. "I want to see some real results for the Great Lakes."

U.S. Rep. Rahm Emanuel (D-Ill.) and U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) are leading a group of lawmakers asking for \$4 billion over five years to tackle problems facing the Great Lakes, including pollution, invasive species, habitat destruction and beach contamination. Similar legislation is pending in the Senate.

One reason the spending bills haven't advanced, Leavitt said, is that nobody is sure how much already is spent on the Great Lakes. The federal government and states set aside about \$1.7 billion for lake programs during the last decade, according to the Government Accounting Office, but there is little coordination and results are difficult to measure.

After a meeting this year with Mayor Richard Daley and other regional leaders, President Bush signed an executive order that created a panel of federal, state, local and tribal officials to hammer out a new restoration plan.

Leaders who gathered at the Chicago Hilton and Towers vowed to make the Great Lakes a national priority, similar to multibillion-dollar efforts to restore the Everglades and Chesapeake Bay.

"This is a generation-to-generation relay," Leavitt said. "Our objective is to be able to say 30 years from now that we made things better."